

United States House of Representatives
Committee on Homeland Security
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence

Hearing on

**“The Future of Homeland Security:
The Rise of Terrorism in Africa”**

Wednesday, September 27, 2023,
10:00 a.m.
310 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, D.C.

Prepared Statement of

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Chairman Pfluger,
Ranking Member Magaziner,
Distinguished Members of the Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and
Intelligence,

Permit me to begin by thanking you, not only for the opportunity to testify before you today on the subject of the rise of terrorism in Africa and its impact on the security of our American homeland, but also for the sustained attention which the United States House of Representatives has given to this challenge. In its oversight capacity, the people’s House—and, especially, the Committee on Homeland Security—has been very much ahead of the curve over the course of the last two decades and it has been my singular privilege to have contributed, however modestly, to that effort over that time.

In fact, if I may cite just one example, it was this esteemed panel’s predecessor, the Subcommittee on Intelligence and Counterterrorism, that twelve years ago convened the very first congressional hearing on Boko Haram, at which I also had the privilege of testifying. At that time, Boko Haram was considered so obscure that the all the participants at the event, held in conjunction with the release of a bipartisan report on the threat posed by the militant group, might have been able to convene in the proverbial broom closet. Sadly, our analysis proved

prescient and, rather than fading away as some dismissively suggested at the time that it would, Boko Haram went on to pose an even greater menace, not only to Nigeria and its people, but to their neighbors in West Africa as well as to international security writ large as it metastasized into the West Africa Province of the so-called Islamic State.

The Current Reality

As the title of this hearing correctly suggests, there is indeed a rise in terrorist activity in Africa and it does impact the future security of our homeland. Let me address both of these aspects in turn.

First, while thankfully the number of deaths caused by terrorism around the globe has been on the decline the last several years—although, of course, even one death is one too many—the progress has been uneven. In Africa, the trend has been, sadly, that of increased violence, with the Sahel region in particular witnessing a significant deterioration with Burkina Faso and Mali recording 1,135 and 944 deaths, respectively, last year according to the data set of the Global Terrorism Index. In fact, just these two Sahelian countries alone accounted for one-third of all deaths from terrorism around the world in 2022. Burkina Faso even edged out Afghanistan for the dubious distinction of being the deadliest country in the world for terrorism. It is not just that the sheer number of deaths has increased from the year before, but the terrorist attacks themselves have become more lethal: the latter has ticked up 38 percent, but the former has gone up 50 percent. Overall, the Sahel region represented 43 percent of global terrorism deaths in 2022, an increase of 7 percent over 2021. If current trends continue, the Sahel region may well account for slightly more than half of the fatalities this year. Africa as a whole represented just under 50 percent of all deaths from terrorism in 2022 and so, barring an attack elsewhere in the world that might result in mass casualties skewing the data, will easily account for a majority of global deaths from terrorism in 2023, with attacks increasingly impacting West African littoral states which had previously experienced few, if any, attacks.

One counterterrorism good news story from Africa in 2022 was Niger, which saw a 79 percent decrease in deaths from terrorism. Alas, the coup in that country exactly two months ago risks undoing that progress.

Second, while the Sahel appears superficially remote to America, it is worth remembering that centuries-old trade routes leading across the Sahara Desert to the Mediterranean and beyond to Europe run across the region. Today those ancient paths are used for both human trafficking and the smuggling of drugs and other contraband to Europe and thus represent a vulnerability to a number of U.S. allies. In addition, in the wake of the pivot from their dependence on Russian oil and gas, many of our European allies have come to rely on energy exported from West African producers via pipelines that traverse the Sahel region. For these and other strategic reasons, the United States has maintained two bases in Niger, with approximately 1,000 men and women of our Armed Forces deployed there, with a mission of both intelligence gathering and counterterrorism across the wider region that has been invaluable—and will prove even more so

in the weeks and months ahead given French President Emmanuel Macron's announcement this past weekend of a pullout of his country's military forces in Niger by the end of this year.

While the regional affiliates of al-Qaeda and the Islamic State that constitute much of the infrastructure for terrorism and violent extremism in the Sahel and across Africa do not presently appear to have the capability to attack the American homeland, that does not mean that they would not if they were somehow, God forbid, to come into those means. Moreover, there are U.S. citizens well within their reach as the long ordeal of aid worker Jeff Woodke, held captive for over six years after he was kidnapped from Niamey, Niger, underscored, as well as significant American economic and other interests across the African continent, including in countries where terrorist groups have been stepping up attacks in recent years, including to Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, and the West African countries along the Gulf of Guinea.

To cite just one example, the administration has rightly won plaudits for its investment, alongside G7 partners and, more recently, the European Union, in strategic corridors like the one stretching from the Angolan port of Lobito to the DRC and on to Zambia (with the possibility of a future extension to the Indian Ocean). These are not just transportation infrastructures that will bring critical minerals to market, but corridors for energy and communications to flow. But one also has to recognize as an al-Qaeda strategist opined nearly two decades ago that, "This is a continent with many potential advantages and exploiting this potential will greatly advance the jihad."

The U.S. Response

Let me now pivot to offer several considerations about the U.S. response to the rise of terrorism in Africa and the possible threat this phenomenon poses to American citizens and interests abroad as well as to the American homeland.

First, time and again, the mistake has been made to underestimate—if not to discount entirely—the threat faced. Part of this is attributable to an analytical bias to limit future possibilities to extrapolations from the past, a hermeneutical choice which ignores the dynamic potential which many terrorist organizations have exhibited. Another part of the explanation is even more basic: the sheer lack of resources for Africa-related intelligence and analysis across the whole of the U.S. government. Given the geopolitical, economic, and security stakes, the failure to invest more in institutions, personnel, training, and strategic focus is incredibly shortsighted.

Second, with the exception of the Department of Defense with the U.S. Africa Command (USAFRICOM), across the U.S. government there is an artificial division of the continent that, quite frankly, is rejected not only by Africans, but is also unhelpful—witness the criticism of the Biden administration by many African leaders for the decision to label its Africa strategy document as one for Sub-Saharan Africa only. In reality, there are few compelling geopolitical, economic, or strategic reasons to do so except possibly for Egypt. In point of fact, the overwhelming majority of the regional political, security, and commercial links extending to and from the other four North African countries go north-south across the Sahara, not east-west

towards the Levant. While I was able to bridge the divide during my tenure as Special Envoy for the Sahel Region with explicit authority from Secretary of State Michael Pompeo to work with both the Bureau of African Affairs and the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, I have had no successor and, in any event, a longer-term, rather than *ad hoc*, solution is needed.

Third, bureaucratic structures are only of value insofar as the positions therein are filled by qualified individuals. Without getting polemics about decision-making in the current administration or political dynamics in the Senate, permit me simply to observe that it does not serve America's interests that key positions go unfilled for months, if not years, including that of U.S. Ambassador to the African Union. Or in the Sahel where, in Niger, the administration waited eight months after the retirement of Ambassador Eric Whitaker in December 2021 before nominating his successor, Kathleen FitzGibbon. Ambassador FitzGibbon waited a full year before receiving unanimous confirmation by the Senate, ironically, the day after a coup overthrew the government she was to have been accredited to, her nomination being held up all that time for reasons having little or nothing to do with her qualifications.

Fourth, closely related to terrorism is the danger posed by lack of effective sovereignty that bedevils many African governments. Often the challenge first manifests itself in criminality, whether in the form of piracy and other brigandage or in that of trafficking, human or material. For the United States, all this means that increasing vigilance against terrorism in Africa also requires greater investments in law enforcement capabilities focused on the continent, including enhanced analytical resources at home, more liaison personnel posted abroad, and stepping up efforts to build the capacity of our partners on the continent. Abroad, this requires a more *pragmatic* attitude that prioritizes maintaining the progress that has been achieved in regions like the Sahel and *realistic* perspective that privileges effective partners who have proven their value over those that have failed time and again—a good candidate for review is our failure to more strategically engage in the Horn of Africa with the Republic of Somaliland, a functional state, while pouring billions into the perennial failed state of rump Somalia, which has as a government minister a terrorist who just a few years ago had a \$5 million bounty on his head from our own Rewards for Justice program.

Fifth, as America's relationships—diplomatic, security, economic, and cultural—with Africa as a whole and with the individual countries on the continent expands and deepens (a positive development to be sure!), an unfortunate downside is that the potential risk to U.S. persons and interests as well as to the homeland necessarily increases. Quite simply, threats exist and more engagement, by its very nature, increases exposure and vulnerability to them. The answer is not to curtail engagement since there are clear strategic imperatives for seeking to build these links, but to ensure that adequate resources are mustered to cope with the meet the rising demand across a whole range of sectors from civil aviation to ports to customs and immigration, etc., for more intelligence on and security against threats originating in Africa.

Sixth, with many supply chains for the critical minerals needed for both the energy transition and new technologies running through Africa, I would invite this distinguished panel to consider a

broader vision of security, not just in protecting the American people and homeland from attacks, but also protecting their access to the strategic materials which are essential for our defense systems and civilian economy.

Seventh, the challenge of terrorism in Africa and any derivative threat to the United States cannot be addressed except in an integrated fashion, with solutions that embrace a broader notion of human security writ large—encompassing social, economic, and political development—which, often enough, also must transcend national and other boundaries. As I repeatedly emphasize during my service as envoy to the Sahel: “The heart of the crisis in the Sahel is one of state legitimacy—a perception by citizens that their government is valid, equitable, and able and willing to meet their needs... Absent states’ commitments to meeting their citizens’ needs, no degree of international engagement is likely to succeed.” This obviously is not a task for the United States alone. Nevertheless, it is one which America has a strategic interest in embracing and leading. This is especially true given the forced retreat of our ally France and increasing activity of geopolitical rivals like China and Russia (as well as the latter’s proxies like the Wagner Group criminal network set up by the late and unlamented Yevgeny Prigozhin).

Conclusion

Successive administrations, both Democrat and Republican, and the Congress deserve credit for efforts in recent years to shift the narrative on Africa towards a greater focus on the extraordinary potential of the continent and its strategic importance. However, if this momentum is to be maintained and the opportunities identified grasped, the United States needs to redouble its own efforts and also work closely with its African and other partners to manage the challenges, overcoming terrorism and other threats to security which stand in the way to an incredibly promising future.

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Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence

STATEMENT OF DONNA O. CHARLES

DIRECTOR OF WEST AFRICA AND THE SAHEL

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

BEFORE THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COUNTERTERRORISM, LAW ENFORCEMENT, AND

INTELLIGENCE (COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY)

27 SEPTEMBER 2023

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Hearing: "The Future of Homeland Security: Addressing the Rise of Terrorism in Africa"
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence

Chairman Pfluger, Ranking Member Magaziner, and distinguished Members of the Subcommittee - I thank you and your staff for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the rise of terrorism in Africa and the potential threat it poses to the Homeland.

In my role as the Director for West Africa and the Sahel at the U.S. Institute of Peace, I lead the Institute's efforts to inform public policy and programs that are designed to help our partners counter terrorism and violent extremism, prevent and stabilize regional conflicts, promote community-led peacebuilding initiatives, and advance good governance reforms in the region. The U.S. Institute of Peace is one of the few independent organizations of its caliber to have in-country staff in some of the most challenging and dynamic areas in the world. I am fortunate to have the opportunity to continue building on two decades of experience in foreign policy and national security from various corners of the U.S. interagency, which includes nearly a decade of service as an active-duty officer in the U.S. Air Force. I am proud of my service to this country and am honored for every opportunity I receive to continue in that service.

During my tenure at the State Department, where I focused on U.S. counterterrorism objectives, operations, and programs in Africa, I witnessed how important it is for the United States to remain vigilant in its efforts to neutralize, contain, and deter threats that could threaten us here at home. While my professional experiences will inform my testimony and responses before you today, they are wholly my own and do not reflect the positions or policies of the U.S. Institute of Peace or any other department or agency.

My testimony will focus on three critical issues that I assess are foundational to addressing the complex landscape of terrorism in Sub-Saharan Africa and how its evolution poses a threat to the Homeland. The first is understanding capabilities and intent, which shape how we think about how known and suspected terrorists operate at home and abroad and how to best counter their efforts; the second is mapping out risks and vulnerabilities to U.S. persons and interests at home and in Africa, including our posture, exposure, and risk tolerance; and the third and final issue is building partnerships and capacities where they matter most. In my experience, the issues I have identified require a robust set of tools and an equally robust policy that defines our strategic interests and political will to apply resources where they are lacking.

Capabilities and Intent

When analyzing the capabilities and intent of prominent foreign terrorist organizations operating throughout Africa, it helps to understand that these groups are not cut from whole cloth. From al-Shabaab in East Africa to ISIS in West Africa, there may be similarities in their distorted ideologies and perceptions of Islam, but their capabilities, intent, and in some cases, tactics, techniques, and procedures, vary for practical reasons. For instance, while most of these terror groups aspire to establish caliphates that extend to the borders of the countries in which they operate and beyond, there is not a single group operating in Sub-Saharan Africa that can accomplish this without overcoming steep hurdles, including rival factions, armed groups, regional forces, and vigilantes. What ISIS accomplished in Syria and Iraq circa 2014ⁱ reminds us

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that the idea of establishing a caliphate is possible but not durable. Understanding this landscape should inform how we develop policies, programs, and operations meant to reduce, if not eliminate, continuing and imminent threats to U.S. persons and interests here and abroad.

I am not aware of any credible evidence available publicly that suggests terrorist groups operating in West Africa and the Sahel pose a continuing and imminent threat to the U.S. Homeland. In this case, it is important to distinguish threats to U.S. persons and interests in the region, including hard targets like U.S. embassies to soft targets like hotels and shopping centers, from threats to the Homeland. Counterterrorism practitioners should not rule out how the evolution of terrorist groups in Africa, for which we have many examples, has resulted in significant shifts in capabilities and intent.

A prime example of this shift in capabilities and intent is the Somalia-based al-Qaeda affiliate al-Shabaab, a U.S. designated foreign terrorist organizationⁱⁱ that is also designated by the UNⁱⁱⁱ and other countries and organizations^{iv}. For almost two decades, analysts have observed al-Shabaab's capabilities and tactics in asymmetrical warfare advance substantially, and almost proportionately to the group's capacity to raise funds and collect revenues from a range of illicit activities and ostensibly legitimate businesses. A body of credible open-source reporting and publicly available testimony from U.S. officials indicate that al-Shabaab remains the wealthiest, largest, and most lethal al-Qaeda affiliate in the world.^v It is only in the last three years that U.S. officials have publicly concluded that al-Shabaab is a threat to the U.S. Homeland as well.^{vi} This conclusion has much to do with the details of an al-Shabaab plot uncovered by Filipino authorities in 2019 that involved an al-Shabaab operative who was in the final stages of completing a flight training program in the Philippines.^{vii} While there have been reports of threats and plots hatched by al-Shabaab against the U.S. Homeland over the last decade^{viii}, this plot was one of the first indicators that al-Shabaab had both the capability and intent to strike targets outside of the East Africa region, and likely inside the United States based on evidence found at the crime scene and elsewhere.

This plot, among others, should inform how the United States and other partners continue to reevaluate and enhance our approaches to countering terrorism threats. In the case of al-Shabaab, the preponderance of resources, including training, equipping, and generally building out counterterrorism capabilities of regional partners like Somalia, Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia, have been focused largely on neutralizing an agile and resilient threat on the ground using traditional and conventional tools.^{ix} However, the ongoing evolution of information technology, including social media, and the growing interconnectedness of our transportation, trade, financial, and communication networks have opened avenues of approach for terrorist groups targeting the United States and our partners. Even modestly resourced terrorist groups no longer limit themselves to launching asymmetrical physical attacks against local or regional targets of opportunity. Most terrorist groups operating in Sub-Saharan Africa have long used social media to radicalize, recruit, and propagandize their campaigns against civilians, Western-aligned regional governments, and, in some cases, the West itself.^{x,xi}

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Al-Shabaab is in a league of its own in Africa when we consider its long history of using social media and other tools to radicalize and recruit youth from the United States, the United Kingdom, and elsewhere who traveled to Somalia, or attempted to travel there, to fight alongside and work on behalf of al-Shabaab or al Qaeda of East Africa.^{xii} Like many other likeminded terrorist groups, al-Shabaab reportedly used its platform to praise the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021.^{xiii} Despite this outward signal of support for the Taliban's cause, I am not aware of any credible and public information indicating the Taliban and Africa-based terrorist groups are linked currently through finances or other means of assistance. However, there is a body of historical reporting that links legacy members of al-Shabaab and its precursor organizations (e.g., Al Ittihad Al Islamiya, known as AIAI, which rose to prominence in Somalia in the 1990s) to training camps in Afghanistan.^{xiv}

Al-Shabaab's origin story, which dates to the early and mid-2000s, paints a clear picture of a group that remains intent on establishing an Islamic caliphate in a Somalia under shari'a law and ousting Ethiopian and other Western-backed forces. The group's focus has been highly localized, allowing it to amass enough power, personnel, and resources to take over large swaths of territory in southern and central Somalia. Over the next decade, al-Shabaab established governance structures throughout the country, meted out justice and retribution through harsh and savage tactics, and expanded its operations to Kenya, Djibouti, Uganda, Ethiopia, and elsewhere in East Africa. As African Union forces, with support from the United States and others, beat al-Shabaab's forces back from strongholds along the coast and the Juba River Valley, the group had less territory to govern and more time to focus on external operations.^{xv} The group's endurance is due in large part to how pervasive al-Shabaab and its proxies are in Somalia and by its capacity to penetrate almost all aspects of Somali society, including financial services, commerce, and telecommunications.^{xvi} In my estimation, the longevity of a group like al-Shabaab is fundamental to its threat profile today. The fact that al-Shabaab had the ability to deploy operatives beyond the continent to obtain flight training speaks to the strategic patience of its leadership, planners, and operatives.

Risks and Vulnerabilities

This example demonstrates why the United States can ill afford to underestimate the nature of the terrorism threat in other parts of Africa, including West Africa and the Sahel, and leads me to the second critical issue the United States must factor into its analysis – mapping risks and vulnerabilities to the U.S. persons and interests, including the Homeland. Most terrorist groups operating in West Africa and the Sahel, which include ISIS and al-Qaeda affiliates, appear focused on conducting asymmetric attacks against regional government forces and softer civilian targets, with many having established human smuggling, narco-trafficking, and kidnapping-for-ransom networks.^{xvii} The latter often target Westerners whose countries are known to pay ransoms for their release.^{xviii} Terrorist organizations based in West Africa and the Sahel have also used their platforms to declare jihad against the West, radicalize recruits, and make a gruesome display of their attacks through social media.^{xix} However, I have not seen credible, publicly

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available evidence to indicate any West Africa-based groups have demonstrated the capability and intent to attack the Homeland.

Terrorist groups throughout the continent have demonstrated the ability to evolve and improve their tactics, techniques, procedures, and targets. This fact holds true for groups that have emerged in recent years in Central Africa (ISIS in the Democratic Republic of the Congo) and southern Africa (ISIS-Mozambique and related networks in South Africa, for example). As a result, the United States should continue to map and mitigate risks and vulnerabilities in the region that unnecessarily expose the Homeland to terrorism threats emanating from the African continent. That mapping effort must include a constant and rigorous assessment of the risk and vulnerability profile of our land and air borders. As of 2019, at least eleven countries in Africa have a last point of departure air route to the United States.^{xx} This datapoint suggests that a terrorist actor in Africa capable and intent on attacking the United States could, after clearing several layers of screening and security protocols, board a flight bound for the United States and use various means to attack the Homeland, either before landing or upon doing so. Similar scenarios include the failed attempt by the ‘Underwear Bomber,’ a Nigerian national serving life in prison who had been recruited and trained by al Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) to conduct the airline attack.^{xxi} While his flight to Michigan was indirect from Yemen through Europe, this example and others - recall al-Shabaab’s failed plot to detonate an explosive-laden laptop in 2016^{xxii} and AQAP’s intercepted printer bomb in 2010^{xxiii} - remain illustrative of how terrorists exploit such vulnerabilities and only need to be lucky once to achieve their objectives.

Our land borders present another vulnerability that terrorist groups in Africa could exploit as thousands of extracontinental migrants and special interest aliens (SIAs) from various countries in Africa have been known to make the dangerous trek to South or Central America onward to the southern border.^{xxiv} In previous positions, I have reviewed several sensitive reports and handled in extremis situations that required extensive coordination between U.S. and foreign partners to identify, track, and apprehend SIAs from Somalia and elsewhere in Africa who were enroute to or had crossed our southern border. Various U.S. administrations have taken measures to leverage biometrics and other technology to improve situational awareness along our air and land borders and reduce the threat to the Homeland from known and suspected terrorists.^{xxv,xxvi,xxvii} Most of these programs require the U.S. government to actively pursue and cultivate partnerships all over the world that will ensure we continue to close seams and gaps in the vast border network. If the United States determines that its tolerance for risk in this regard is and should remain low, then we must reckon with what lowering that risk requires in terms of additional personnel, fiscal resources, and purposeful diplomatic engagement.

Building Capacities and Strengthening Partnerships

Building and improving partner capacity must continue to be a central part of our counterterrorism and border security strategy, especially in many regions of Africa where borders are often porous and security measures are easily evaded through bribery or overcome by force.

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In my view, the United States has shown exemplary effort in developing and implementing whole-of-government and whole-of-society approaches to countering terrorism and violent extremism, but decision makers and other stakeholders need to agree that these approaches must use a “both/and” strategy rather than “either/or” to ensure we are successful left and right of the boom. While tradeoffs are unavoidable when resources are finite, the United States cannot afford to compromise on a comprehensive, effective counterterrorism strategy that includes:

- Sustainable physical security measures, including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance technology;
- High-quality, strategic information sharing agreements such as HSPD-6;
- Sustainable capacity-building programs that facilitate technology transfers; and
- Initiatives that counter radicalization and recruitment, support reconciliation and peacebuilding measures, and promote political stability and reform.

Erosion of Democracy and the Rise of Insecurity

West Africa and the Sahel present a particularly challenging and acute problem set. While the region has never been immune to various forms of instability, the last five years have forced us to reckon with decades of failed and stagnant policies that helped precipitate the spate of coup d'états we are witnessing today. The political convulsions throughout the region, however, should not be viewed as a monolith. The ostensible predicate for the coup in Guinea looks nothing like what transpired in Sudan, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. The runup to the recent coup d'état in Gabon is reportedly beset by a complicated brew of ruling family palace intrigue^{xxviii} and Great Power Competition.^{xxix}

What most of these extra-constitutional movements have in common to varying degrees is the role foreign adversaries aim to have in shaping and further stoking anti-Western sentiments, regardless of whether they are organic or sensationalized.^{xxx} The Russian Federation and its proxies such as Wagner and Sewa Security Services continue to make significant headway in exploiting critical minerals and natural resources in exchange for flimsy security cooperation agreements^{xxxi} largely because, in my view, these impressionable juntas in Mali, Burkina Faso, and now Niger have created or intensified political and security vacuums. These natural resources are crucial for the Kremlin's ongoing efforts to evade U.S. and Western sanctions and fund its illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, but the juntas who seek Russia's support to counter terrorism and armed groups in their backyards have been left with little to show for these agreements.^{xxxii}

The security situation in Mali and Burkina Faso, which the juntas in these countries used to justify their putsches, has not stabilized or improved. In fact, recent reports indicate that these countries have seen a rise in terrorist attacks since the juntas overthrew their democratically elected governments.^{xxxiii} While the Burkinabe, Nigerien, and Malian juntas enter security pacts to protect each, it appears these militaries – before and after their coup d'états - can barely

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protect themselves and their people without considerable external support. For instance, Burkina Faso's military has experienced several mutinous uprisings over the last decade due to lack of pay and inadequate training, resources, and leadership.^{xxxiv}

Reassessing the U.S. Approach

This security situation unfolding throughout and beyond West Africa and the Sahel underscores the need for the United States and its likeminded partners to reassess its policy, strategy, and posture on the continent. The situation is complicated, but with sustained political will and sufficient resources, the United States can help change the unfortunate trends in the region. Specific remedies include taking a hard look at how U.S. strategies for engaging in Africa are reconciled with the resources being applied, including U.S. embassy staffing. The United States must consider whether its objectives, programs, and overall ambitions in Africa align with the resources provided for our embassies in Burkina Faso, Niger, and in the Coastal West Africa region, where additional resources provided through the Global Fragility Act will be spread out over five countries.^{xxxv}

Unfortunately, U.S. security cooperation throughout Africa has been mischaracterized in a way to suggest that training and equipping African forces is a recipe for coup d'états and political instability. Those who watch the region closely will agree this misperception is dangerous, counterproductive, and fails to address issues that existed long before these partnerships emerged. Building core capacities to counter terrorism, secure borders, and develop regional solutions to regional problems at all levels of government and through civil society is the ideal approach toward balancing the three "Ds" of U.S. foreign policy – defense, development, and diplomacy.

Conclusion

I am encouraged by the Department of Defense's desire to continue developing tools that help get at the threat "left of the boom" – including through civil military operations, exchange programs, and professional development programs like International Military Education & Training (IMET). There is also room to improve upon critical capabilities such as anti-money laundering and countering the financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) programs funded by the Departments of Defense and State that are designed to detect and deter the flow of funds to terror groups like al-Shabaab and ISIS. The United States and its partners are enhancing social network analysis and open-source intelligence technologies as another means of identifying the front and back ends of radicalization and terrorist recruitment networks. Continuing to invest in these and other measures as part of a balanced and strategic counterterrorism approach will redound to the United States' efforts to protect U.S. persons and interests in the region and in the Homeland.

Thank you for holding a hearing on this important topic, as well as your bipartisan commitment to safeguarding the country and its citizens. It has been an honor and a privilege to appear before this committee today and I look forward to answering your questions.

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- ⁱ (Director of National Intelligence 2022)
 - ⁱⁱ (U.S. Department of State n.d.)
 - ⁱⁱⁱ (United Nations n.d.)
 - ^{iv} (UK Home Office 2023)
 - ^v (Department of Defense 2022)
 - ^{vi} (U.S. Department of State 2022)
 - ^{vii} (U.S. Department of Justice 2020)
 - ^{viii} (ABC News 2015)
 - ^{ix} (U.S. Department of State 2022)
 - ^x (Office of the Director of National Intelligence 2022)
 - ^{xi} (USIP, Wilson Center 2017)
 - ^{xii} (Council on Foreign Relations 2022)
 - ^{xiii} (Kaledzi 2021)
 - ^{xiv} (United Nations 2022)
 - ^{xv} (Council on Foreign Relations 2022)
 - ^{xvi} (United Nations 2012)
 - ^{xvii} (United Nations 2022)
 - ^{xviii} (UK Home Office 2022)
 - ^{xix} (USIP, Wilson Center 2017)
 - ^{xx} (Sims 2019)
 - ^{xxi} (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2015)
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 - ^{xxiii} (U.S. Department of State Bureau of Diplomatic Security (Rewards for Justice) 2023)
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 - ^{xxv} (U.S. Department of State 2019)
 - ^{xxvi} (U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement 2023)
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 - ^{xxviii} (Dougueli 2023)
 - ^{xxix} (Deutschmann 2023)
 - ^{xxx} (Lucas 2023)
 - ^{xxxi} (Arieff 2023)
 - ^{xxxii} (Sany 2023)
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 - ^{xxxiv} (Al Jazeera 2023)
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The Future of Homeland Security: Addressing the Rise of Terrorism in Africa

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Testimony before the House Committee on Homeland Security,
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence

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Thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for giving me the opportunity to testify today on terrorism threats emanating from parts of the African continent, in particular focusing on issues and recommendations related to the Sahel region, especially in Mali where insecurity is getting worse by the day. There are two main jihadist groups now operating there: the Islamic State's Sahel Province and Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM).

This increased insecurity can be directly linked to the August 2022 withdrawal of French forces operating under the Operation Barkhane counterinsurgency mission. At the time of the French departure, the Mali insurgency had not been deterred or defeated, but it has undoubtedly worsened since. This suggests France at the very least was managing the situation in hopes that a future easing of the political tempest would facilitate a more sustainable resolution. The French withdrew at the request of the government of interim Malian president Assimi Goita, who seized power after a May 2021 coup and expressed his preference for the Russian-sponsored Wagner Group as a counterterrorism partner.

The latter point highlights the fact that Washington and its allies cannot bifurcate counterterrorism and great power competition. A position that casts counterterrorism and great power competition as an either/or challenge will only undermine the challenge of both. While this discussion is focused on Mali and the Sahel more generally, this dynamic first occurred in Syria since the 2011 uprising and is also playing out in Afghanistan following the U.S. withdrawal in mid-August 2021.¹

¹ Aaron Y. Zelin, "Syria at the Center of Power Competition and Counterterrorism," Policy Notes 95, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, February 2021, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/syria-center-power-competition-and-counterterrorism>; Aaron Y. Zelin, "Looking for Legitimacy: Taliban Diplomacy Since the Fall of Kabul," Policy Watch 3640, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, August 15, 2022, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/looking-legitimacy-taliban-diplomacy-fall-kabul>.

Current State of Play

According to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project (ACLED), 60 percent of Wagner’s violent engagements in Mali have targeted civilian noncombatants, as compared to 37 percent of Malian army actions.² Furthermore, each Wagner attack—a category that includes kidnapping, sexual violence, and torture—kills an average of seven noncombatants, twice the average caused by Malian army attacks.³ Rights groups argue that such Wagner actions unintentionally drive support for the Islamic State in Mali (IS-M) and JNIM, which capitalizes on grievances against local governments for recruitment purposes.⁴ Likewise, on June 30, 2023, the UN Security Council voted to end the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA) mandate, raising the likelihood of greater impunity for all sides.

According to the late August 2023 UN report on IS-M and JNIM, “the passage of time appears to favor the terrorist groups [JNIM] and Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, whose military capacities and community penetration grow each day.”⁵ The same report states that “in less than a year, [IS-M] has almost doubled its areas of control” in rural eastern Menaka and large parts of the Ansongo area in southern Gao.⁶ As for JNIM, the report states that it controls several gold mining sites across northern Mali and villages in at least the Mopti region.⁷ Strikingly, within the month since MINUSMA’s withdrawal from northern Mali, the prevalence of violence has doubled, portending a situation wherein IS-M, JNIM, and other nonstate actors can exploit a growing vacuum unfilled by either the Malian military or Wagner.⁸

Making matters even more complicated for Washington, on September 16, Mali signed a mutual defense treaty, officially named the Alliance of Sahel States, with Burkina Faso and Niger—an alternative and competitor to the French-led G5 Sahel alliance (originally including Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Niger), one of the main bulwarks against IS-M and JNIM in the region.⁹ Therefore, today, as IS-M and JNIM exploit Mali’s security vacuum, Washington lacks space to productively intervene given its soured relationship with Bamako and the military regime’s preference for working with Wagner. Unfortunately, the current trajectory will only benefit the jihadists whom the Malian government claims it wants to defeat.

² Ladd Serwat et al., “Wagner Group Operations in Africa: Civilian Targeting Trends in the Central African Republic and Mali,” Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project, August 30, 2022, <https://acleddata.com/2022/08/30/wagner-group-operations-in-africa-civilian-targeting-trends-in-the-central-african-republic-and-mali>.

³ “Wagner Routinely Targets Civilians in Africa,” *Economist*, August 31, 2023, <https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2023/08/31/wagner-routinely-targets-civilians-in-africa>.

⁴ Sam Mednick, “Violence Soars in Mali in the Year After Russians Arrive,” Associated Press, January 14, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/politics-mali-government-russia-violence-10ba966bceb2dc732cb170b16258e5a6>.

⁵ UN Security Council, “Letter Dated 3 August 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Mali Established Pursuant to Resolution 2374 (2017) Addressed to the President of the Security Council,” August 3, 2023, https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2023_578.pdf.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Mali’s Junta Struggles to Fight Growing Violence in a Northern Region as UN Peacekeepers Withdraw,” Associated Press, September 22, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/mali-junta-rebels-jihadi-peacekeeping-coup-insecurity-7af6356feec5ce409501f4c7e7dc42f8>.

⁹ “Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso Sign Sahel Security Pact,” Reuters, September 16, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/mali-niger-burkina-faso-sign-sahel-security-pact-2023-09-16>.

Background

IS-M and JNIM's presence in Mali can be traced to an unrelated, decades-old insurgency in the north focused on Tuareg rights that was exploited by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and its local allies in 2011-12. AQIM, which benefited from the Libyan weapons bazaar that flourished after the 2011 fall of Muammar Qadhafi, seized territory in spring 2012 in a region of northern Mali referred to locally as Azawad. Even as France's Operation Serval dismantled this statelet in January 2013, the AQIM-led insurgency continued, prompting an expansion of the jihadist campaign to neighboring countries, especially Burkina Faso. Within Mali, the AQIM-led jihadist alliance included more localized groups like Ansar al-Din and Katibat al-Macina, alongside AQIM splinter groups more regionalized in scope including Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad fi Gharb Ifriqiya (JTWJ- GI) and Katibat al-Mulathamin.

AQIM's monopoly on the Malian "jihadosphere," however, was interrupted by the *baya* (allegiance pledge) given by Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi to then IS "caliph" Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi on May 13, 2015, which the group accepted on October 31, 2016.¹⁰ Sahrawi, who became the first leader of IS-M, had previously cofounded JTWJ-GI and served on its shura council. This group, founded in October 2011, merged in August 2013 with Katibat al-Mulathamin, led by Mokhtar Belmokhtar, to form al-Murabitun, for which Sahrawi also served as a senior leader.¹¹ Remnants of al-Murabitun eventually merged back into AQIM in December 2015, possibly in response to Sahrawi's announcement, which Belmokhtar rejected.¹² Likewise, the remaining pro-AQIM groups—Ansar al-Din and Katibat al-Macina—publicly formalized ties with the al-Qaeda branch on March 2, 2017, adopting the name Jamaat Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin.¹³

During the first few years when IS-M and JNIM operated simultaneously in Mali, the "Sahel exception" prevailed, as described by French journalist Wassim Nasr. According to this arrangement, the two groups implicitly agreed not to fight each other directly—a contrast with the situation in places like Syria, Yemen, Somalia, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.¹⁴ But in early 2020, this tacit agreement collapsed, and the two groups have engaged in bloody if select clashes ever since due to JNIM's fears of

¹⁰ Adnan Abu Walid al-Sahrawi, "Announcing a New Amir and Giving Bay'ah to al-Baghdadi," Jamaat al-Tawhid wal-Jihad fi Gharb Ifriqiya, May 13, 2015, <https://jihadology.net/2015/05/13/new-audio-message-from-al-murabi%E1%B9%ADuns-adnan-abu-walid-al-%E1%B9%A3a%E1%B8%A5rawi-announcing-a-new-amir-and-giving-bayah-to-al-baghdadi>; Abu al-Walid Sahrawi, "Pledge of Allegiance in Northern Mali to Shaykh Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi and Joining the Islamic State," Wi-Kallat Amaq al-Ikhabariyah, October 30, 2016, <https://jihadology.net/2016/10/30/new-video-message-from-abu-al-walid-%E1%B9%A3a%E1%B8%A5rawi-pledge-of-allegiance-in-northern-mali-to-shaykh-abu-bakr-al-baghdadi-and-joining-the-islamic-state>.

¹¹ Caleb Weiss, "AQIM's Imperial Playbook: Understanding al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb's Expansion into West Africa," Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, April 2022, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/aqims-imperial-playbook-understanding-al-qaida-in-the-islamic-maghrebs-expansion-into-west-africa>.

¹² Abu Musab Abd al-Wadud (Abdelmalek Droukdel), "About al-Murabitun Joining the Base of Jihad Organization, Adopting the Recent Mali Operation, and Messages to the West," al-Andalus Foundation for Media Production, December 3, 2015, <https://jihadology.net/2015/12/03/new-video-message-from-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghrebs-abu-mu%E1%B9%A3ab-abd-al-wadud-abd-al-malik-drukdil-about-al-murabi%E1%B9%ADun-joining-the-ba>.

¹³ JNIM, "Founding Statement," al-Zallaqah Foundation for Media Production, March 2, 2017, <https://jihadology.net/2017/03/02/new-video-message-from-jamaah-nu%E1%B9%A3rat-al-islam-wa-l-muslimin-founding-statement>.

¹⁴ Wassim Nasr, "ISIS in Africa: The End of the 'Sahel Exception,'" Newlines Institute for Strategy and Policy, June 2, 2020, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/isis/isis-in-africa-the-end-of-the-sahel-exception>.

fighter defections to IS-M.¹⁵ Setting aside these clashes, IS and JNIM mostly operate in separate regions of Mali. According to JNIM's claims of responsibility in the country, the group has operated mostly in the southeastern, central, and far northern regions of Mopti, Timbuktu, Koulikoro, Kayes, Segou, and Sikasso, while IS-M—as of September 2023—has remained in the far eastern regions of Gao and Menaka.

Compared with attacks claimed by other IS “provinces,” the IS-M numbers appear paltry: three in 2016; eight in 2017; ten in 2018; sixteen in 2019; thirty-five in 2020; fourteen in 2021; twenty-nine in 2022; and fifteen as of September 2023. Of course, before April 2019, the IS media office simply did not claim Mali-based attacks, and it may have purposefully limited its claims since.¹⁶ This approach would cohere with IS practices elsewhere, particularly in Syria, where leaked documents show that military commanders intentionally prevent publication of claims owing to a lack of technology/internet access, security concerns, or mere indifference.¹⁷ Moreover, in a recent issue of the Islamic State's Pashto-language Voice of Khorasan magazine, the Khorasan “province” notes that the seeming decline in Afghanistan-based operations can be attributed to a policy of silence, similar to that employed in Syria.¹⁸

When compared with JNIM's claimed attack data so far in 2023, it further illustrates that IS-M is likely not claiming most of its attacks, especially considering both groups control territory and there's a major discrepancy between the two groups' attack tempo. JNIM to date since January 1 has claimed 136 attacks this year, which is on pace for 185 attacks.

From an American security perspective, one issue that is potentially worrying in the future is that a cohort of regional foreign fighters mainly from surrounding countries has appeared in IS-M and JNIM's ranks over the years. It is unlikely, however, that we will see a mobilization similar to what happened in Syria last decade. One reason for low fighter migration to sub-Saharan Africa is the area's lack of religious-historical resonance for Muslims relative to the Levant and Arabian Peninsula. More practically, transit to Mali is arduous, whereas Turkey—a global travel hub—provides an easy gateway to Syria. Yet the Mali situation bears watching all the same.

It should be noted that JNIM and its parent organization AQIM have been uninterested in external operations against Westerners in their homelands. For example, in June 2021 AQIM leader Abu Obaida Yusuf al-Annabi said that France was “deceiving” its citizens by saying that the country's operations in Mali were necessary to protect France from jihadist attacks at home, because there has never been an attack on French soil by a Malian or orchestrated by Mali-based jihadists.¹⁹ However, AQIM/JNIM have had no qualms about attacking Western targets or regional interests in the past: see, for example, its longstanding kidnapping campaign going back fifteen-plus-years, the December

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Prior to IS officially claiming attacks in April 2019, the data from 2016 to April 2019 is from information shared with the author by Menastream, a risk consultancy led by researcher Heni Nsaibia.

¹⁷ Aaron Y. Zelin and Devorah Margolin, “The Islamic State's Shadow Governance in Eastern Syria Since the Fall of Baghuz,” *CTC Sentinel* 16, no. 9, <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-islamic-states-shadow-governance-in-eastern-syria-since-the-fall-of-baghuz>.

¹⁸ Islamic State's Wilayat Khorasan, “Voice of Khorasan Magazine Issue #25,” al-Azaim Media Foundation, August 28, 2023, <https://jihadology.net/2023/08/28/new-magazine-issue-from-the-islamic-states-wilayat-khorasan-voice-of-khorasan-25-2>.

¹⁹ Sheikh Abu Obaida Yusuf al-Annabi, “And God Will Surely Support Those Who Support Him,” al-Andalus Foundation for Media Production, June 20, 2021, <https://jihadology.net/2021/06/20/new-video-message-from-al-qaidah-in-the-islamic-maghribs-shaykh-abu-ubaydah-yusuf-al-anabi-and-god-will-surely-support-those-who-support-him>.

2012 In Amenas hostage crisis and attack in Algeria, the May 2013 attack on a military barracks in Agadez, Niger, and a French-owned and operated uranium mine in Arlit, Niger, the November 2015 Radisson Blu Hotel attack in Mali, the January 2016 Cappuccino restaurant and Splendid Hotel attack in Burkina Faso, and the March 2016 Grand-Bassam attack in the Ivory Coast. Though it appears that since the group became known exclusively as JNIM in Mali in 2017, there has been less of that activity regionally.

The greater risk for potential external operations comes from IS-M, even if it remains a low risk at this juncture. History dictates that the longer the group possesses a safe haven and the opportunity to expand its rule, the more capable it will be of planning operations, whether directed, guided, or inspired—as previously observed by IS “provinces” in Syria, Libya, and Afghanistan.²⁰

More immediately, IS-M and JNIM’s success in Mali may likewise prompt forays into nearby regions. One possibility is that the infusion of resources will be reinvested into faltering operations in North Africa, especially Algeria, Libya, and Tunisia. Such a trend would mark an effective reversal of the southward flow of arms, money, and militancy from North Africa following the 2011 revolutions. Alternatively, IS-M and JNIM might try to extend farther south into the Gulf of Guinea countries like Benin and Togo, where both have grown slowly in recent years, or even push into newer countries such as Ghana, Cote d’Ivoire, or Guinea.²¹

Internally, worsening security dynamics across Mali will continue to open operating space for JNIM and IS-M, particularly in light of recent reports of conflict between the aligned Wagner Group and Malian military and the formerly pro-government Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA),²² a coalition of Tuareg militant factions.²³ Various Tuareg militants may also choose to align with one of the jihadist factions, even though no evidence suggests this has happened yet.²⁴

Therefore, in Mali and the broader Sahel, security dynamics involving local, regional, and global actors have produced a fluid geopolitical situation that benefits the local Islamic State “province” as

²⁰ Petter Nesser, “Military Interventions, Jihadi Networks, and Terrorist Entrepreneurs: How the Islamic State Terror Wave Rose So High in Europe,” *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 3 (March 2019), <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/military-interventions-jihadi-networks-terrorist-entrepreneurs-islamic-state-terror-wave-rose-high-europe>; Aaron Y. Zelin, “The Others: Foreign Fighters in Libya,” Policy Note 45 (Washington DC: Washington Institute, 2018), <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/others-foreign-fighters-libya>; Aaron Y. Zelin, “ISKP Goes Global: External Operations from Afghanistan,” PolicyWatch 3778, Washington Institute, September 11, 2023, <https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/iskp-goes-global-external-operations-afghanistan>.

²¹ Sam Mednick and Virgile Ahissou, “Jihadi Violence Hits Benin, Shows Spread Across West Africa,” Associated Press, December 28, 2022, <https://apnews.com/article/islamic-state-group-al-qaida-politics-benin-violence-e70ea4e0cf5211785cf1cb20c4b38487>; “Togo Extends State of Emergency in North,” Agence France-Presse, April 7, 2023, <https://www.barrons.com/news/togo-extends-state-of-emergency-in-north-5c083845>; “Ghana Sends Special Forces to Border as Sahel Violence Spreads,” African Defense Forum, May 9, 2023, <https://adf-magazine.com/2023/05/ghana-sends-special-forces-to-border-as-sahel-violence-spreads>; Annie Linskey, “Kamala Harris Pledges \$100 Million to West Africa Nations to Fight Extremist Threat,” *Wall Street Journal*, March 27, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/kamala-harris-pledges-100-million-to-west-africa-nations-to-fight-extremist-threat-6f02504e>.

²² Coordination of Azawad Movements, post on X (formerly Twitter), September 12, 2023, <https://twitter.com/cicamazawad/status/1701653679831478529>.

²³ Andrew Lebovich, “Mapping Armed Groups in Mali and the Sahel: Mouvement Pour Le Salut de Azawad, Groupe D’Autodefense Tuareg Imghad et Allies,” European Council on Foreign Relations, May 2019, https://ecfr.eu/special/sahel_mapping.

²⁴ “Letter Dated 3 August 2023 from the Panel of Experts on Mali,” https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/atf/cf/%7B65BFCF9B-6D27-4E9C-8CD3-CF6E4FF96FF9%7D/S_2023_578.pdf.

well as JNIM and other nonstate actors. Today's reality, of course, does great damage to the Sahelian population.

Recommendations

The current Malian preference for Wagner, which effectively blocks Western nations from the theater, limits U.S. options for meaningfully shaping dynamics on the ground. Even if the United States or its French or other allies were more inclined to assert themselves, broader geostrategic concerns could hinder their appetite for a counterterrorism turf war with Russia. Tenuous U.S. ties with the current Nigerien leadership further complicate the situation and may hinder the effectiveness of the local U.S. drone base, which has been used against both IS Sahel Province and JNIM militants over the years. Washington should therefore prepare for the possibility that Niger could ask the United States to leave, as Mali recently did with France. Contingency planning for a drone base could include engaging countries like Ghana or Senegal, allowing for a backup plan amid the current trajectory.

The U.S. Treasury Department should consider applying broader sanctions against IS-M and JNIM leaders and financial networks. To date, only four senior figures have been designated from JNIM and two from IS-M,²⁵ with two of these six figures now dead. Furthermore, neither group has seen a designation against them since 2021, even as both groups have gotten stronger in Mali. Broader targeting could potentially limit IS-M's and JNIM's ability to move money across borders. However, clear insight into the deep bench of IS-M and JNIM leadership or financiers is unavailable in the open source space. Therefore, the State and Treasury Departments should use classified information and draw from the intelligence community to shed light on these figures, in turn denying them opportunities to help IS-M and JNIM.

Likewise, it is also worth confronting the Wagner Group and its logistics without hesitation. In late July, the U.S. sanctioned three Malian officials (Defense Minister Col. Sadio Camara, Air Force Chief of Staff Col. Alou Boi Diarra, and Deputy Chief of Staff Lt. Col. Adama Bagayoko) for facilitating and expanding the Wagner Group's operations in the country since December 2021.²⁶ This is a good start, though it would be worthwhile to target those within the Wagner Group more specifically as the United States has done previously with its officials' activity in the Ukraine war. Due to the cross-border nature of the conflict in Mali and its connections to the insurgencies in Burkina Faso and Niger, as well as the two countries also working with the Wagner Group, considering sanctions related to these activities in those countries is worth exploring as well.

Finally, there has been a growing perception, true or not, in the Sahel region and elsewhere in the world that the United States can be fickle with its allies in contrast to Russia, which backs them no matter what. Therefore, before the security situation devolves even more and spreads to other countries again, it is imperative that Washington sticks to its allies regionally and makes these efforts visible. Otherwise, it should not be surprised if Moscow tries to find cracks in the foundations of relations and leverages insecurity to take advantage and undermine the U.S. position in the region in the way already seen in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Remembering that counterterrorism and great power competition are linked in these conflict zones will also alleviate tactical and strategic misunderstandings and deter Russia from taking advantage of a warped view by Washington that these issue-sets are somehow not linked.

²⁵ U.S. Department of State, "Individuals and Entities Designated by the State Department Under E.O. 13224," last updated June 20, 2023, <https://www.state.gov/executive-order-13224/#state>.

²⁶ Anthony J. Blinken, "Imposing Sanctions on Malian Officials in Connection with the Wagner Group," U.S. Department of State, July 24, 2023, <https://ru.usembassy.gov/imposing-sanctions-on-malian-officials-in-connection-with-the-wagner-group>.

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"The Future of Homeland Security: Addressing the Rise of Terrorism in Africa"

Chairman Pfluger, Ranking Member Magaziner, and members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on this important topic.

My name is Joshua Meservey, and I am a Senior Fellow at Hudson Institute. The views I express in this testimony are my own and should not be construed as representing an official position of Hudson Institute.

The Rise and Rise of African Terrorism

African terrorism is amid an extraordinary expansion. According to the Institute for Economics & Peace's latest Global Terrorism Index, in 2022 the Sahel was the site of 43 percent of all terrorism deaths worldwide, up from 1 percent in 2007. Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole accounted for 60 percent of all terrorism deaths last year.¹ The Africa Center for Strategic Studies documented a nearly 50 percent increase in 2022 in the number of deaths due to Islamist terrorism in Africa, a growth rate around 2.5 times what it was 10 years ago.² The Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project recorded increases in political violence of 77 percent and 150 percent from 2021 to 2022 in Burkina Faso and Mali, respectively, though those rates include more than just terrorist violence.³

There are also now effective and committed Islamist terrorists operating in parts of Africa with little history of Islamist terrorism. In northern Mozambique, for instance, a group known as Ansar al-Sunna Wa Jamma (ASWJ) in 2017 began rapidly expanding in Cabo Delgado province, eventually rooting

¹ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2023*, March 2023, <https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/GTI-2023-web-170423.pdf>.

² The Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *African Militant Islamist Group-Linked Fatalities at All-Time High*, July 31, 2023, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/africa-militant-islamist-group-linked-fatalities-at-all-time-high/>.

³ ACLED, *The Sahel: Geopolitical Transition at the Center of an Ever-Worsening Crisis*, February 8, 2023, <https://acleddata.com/conflict-watchlist-2023/sahel/>.



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itself in six districts, killing thousands of Mozambicans, and displacing many more. It became an affiliate of the so-called Islamic State in 2021, which marked its peak when it may have had as many as 5,000 fighters and associates. A Rwandan military intervention that year finally pushed the group back and stabilized much of the province. ASWJ is not defeated, however, as it took refuge in the dense Catupa Forest from where it continues to launch attacks that increasingly feature improvised explosive devices and suicide bombers.

A group with a longer history than the ASWJ, called the Allied Democratic Forces (ADF), is another example of the recent, rapid growth of African terrorism. The ADF has existed for decades, but was such a relatively minor player in the welter of eastern DRC's armed groups that it was nearly defunct by 2017.⁴ However, around that time it began receiving funding from the Islamic State that eventually propelled it to its status today as one of eastern DRC's most potent armed groups that recruits foreign fighters and performs operations in multiple countries.⁵ A Ugandan military operation against the ADF—officially known as Islamic State Central Africa Province following its affiliation with the Islamic State—that began in 2021 has degraded the group, but it continues to launch costly and brutal attacks, and maintains ties to other terrorist organizations.

The spread of Islamist terrorism in Africa challenges the U.S.'s ability to protect the American homeland as hatred of the U.S. is baked into Islamist terrorists' beliefs and operations.⁶ Every significant African terrorist group subscribes to Salafi-jihadism, a sub-sect of the Salafi wing of Sunni Islam. Salafis believe that the only authentic practice of Islam is to live as did the *Salaf*—the initial

⁴ The ADF formed in northern Uganda but was driven from there in the 1990s. It has primarily operated in eastern DRC ever since.

⁵ These include a November 2021 triple suicide bombing in Kampala, Uganda, and an increased tempo of attacks that killed nearly triple the number of people in 2021 than they did in 2019. See Caleb Weiss, Ryan O'Farrell, Tara Candland, and Laren Poole, "Fatal Transaction: The Funding Behind the Islamic State's Central Africa Province," Program on Extremism at George Washington, June 2023, https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs5746/files/2023-06/fatal-transaction-final_0.pdf and Tara Candland, Ryan O'Farrell, Laren Poole, and Caleb Weiss, "The Rising Threat to Central Africa: The Transformation of the Islamic State's Congolese Branch." *CTC Sentinel* 15, no. 6 (June 2022) <https://ctc.westpoint.edu/the-rising-threat-to-central-africa-the-2021-transformation-of-the-islamic-states-congolese-branch/>.

⁶ Anti-Western, and specifically anti-American, screeds are staples of Salafi-jihadi propaganda. For instance, in 1998, Osama bin Laden issued a ruling declaring that it was the individual duty of Muslims to kill Americans and Jews wherever they were found. One of the Islamic State's online publications, the now-defunct *Dabiq*, is replete with diatribes against the U.S., while al-Shabaab's most recent major propaganda release rails against America as well. For an excerpt of the al-Shabaab video, see Live From Somalia (@Live_F_Somalia), "UPDATE: Al Shabab group's deputy leader Mahad Karate said in a new video that they have seized vehicles, weapons, munitions and other military gears worth \$23 million following the group's recent suicide and gun attack on SNA camp in Osweine area of Galgadud region, X, September 15, 2023, 11:07 AM, https://twitter.com/Live_F_Somalia/status/1702700694459851171. For bin Laden's *fatwa*, see Federation of American Scientists, *Jihad Against Jews and Crusaders: World Islamic Front Statement*, February 23, 2008, <https://irp.fas.org/world/para/docs/980223-fatwa.htm>.

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generations of Muslims, including the prophet Mohammed and his companions—and according to a literal interpretation of certain Islamic holy texts. Salafi-jihadis go further by claiming that authentic Islamic practice requires Muslims to violently impose “pure” Islamic living on everyone, including on fellow Muslims who do not interpret their faith in the precise way that Salafi-jihadis do. Salafi-jihadis, then, believe that they are *required* to fight the West, especially its leader, the U.S. Salafi-jihadis especially revile the West because of its tolerance of various religions, its secular laws, its supposed subjugation and humiliation of Muslim lands, and its societies that they believe are decadent and immoral.⁷

African Islamic State and al-Qaeda affiliates are largely autonomous from their core organizations, and not all members of terrorist organizations subscribe to the Salafi-jihadi theology. People join such groups for a wide variety of reasons, including for money, power, protection, or because of political beliefs. Yet the core leadership of Salafi-jihadi organizations behave as if they have a sincere commitment to the ideology, even if there are some esoteric theological or tactical differences among and within the groups. American policymakers should assume that, if given the chance, an African terrorist organization would attack the U.S.

Furthermore, there are now vast spaces in places like Mali and Burkina Faso controlled or influenced by terrorist groups. These are the types of safe havens where terrorists, if left unpressured, have the time and space to plot more ambitious attacks, including against the United States. America has painful experience of this reality after Osama bin Laden spent undisturbed years in Sudan where he planned the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

The relatively good news is that the direct threat of African terrorism to the American homeland is, for now, limited. African terrorists are today focused on fighting their local governments or other rivals, and they generally lack many of the advanced capabilities necessary to strike within the U.S. The requisite coordination and planning for such an attack are especially difficult in the African context, and the agencies tasked with protecting the U.S. now have had decades of experience detecting and disrupting terror plots.

The risk of complacency and distraction is real, however, and the increased flow of illegal immigration across the southern border has heightened the risk of an attack. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) recently reported an increase in the number of people on the FBI’s terror watchlist trying to illegally cross the border.⁸ As the number of illegal immigrants from the Eastern Hemisphere has already more than doubled this fiscal year from last, Africa likely accounts for part of the increase in individuals on the FBI’s watchlist that CBP has encountered at the border.

⁷ For example, see “The Fitrah of Mankind and the Near Extinction of the Western Woman,” *Dabiq*, Vol. 15, <https://web.archive.org/web/20170421153001/https://clarionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/islamic-state-magazine-dabiq-fifteen-breaking-the-cross.pdf>.

⁸ Julia Ainsley, “Number of People on Terrorist Watchlist Stopped at Southern U.S. Border has Risen,” *NBC News*, September 14, 2023, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/national-security/number-people-terror-watchlist-stopped-mexico-us-border-risen-rcna105095>.

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Nonetheless, lone wolf attacks—attacks conducted by terrorists inspired by but with no formal connection to an established terrorist group—likely remains the most direct danger from African terrorist groups to the U.S. homeland. Fortunately, there does not appear to be any African terrorist organization with significant appeal within the U.S. Al-Shabaab once attracted support from dozens of Americans and U.S. permanent residents, including by inspiring them to travel to Somalia to fight,⁹ but that support has either largely dried up or sympathizers no longer dare to act.

The Threat to the U.S.

While African terrorism's most potent threats to the U.S. are more indirect than an attack on the homeland, they are still worrisome. They include:

- 1) Attacking Americans and American interests on the continent.** African Islamist terrorist groups have attacked American targets on the continent for decades. The deadliest such attack was the 1998 bombing of the U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania; one of the most recent was the 2020 strike on a joint U.S.-Kenya military base in Manda Bay that killed three Americans.¹⁰ In the Sahel, al-Qaeda in 2015 and twice in 2016 attacked targets frequented by foreigners in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Cote d'Ivoire, respectively, killing dozens, including Americans.¹¹ African terrorist groups will continue looking for those types of opportunities.
- 2) Providing military leaders with a pretext for launching coups.** Putschists in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger invoked their country's worsening insecurity as justification for taking power. When a junta takes over, the U.S.'s ability to work with the affected government is circumscribed, both by American law and because of the mismatch in governing systems that promotes distrust and friction. Achieving U.S. national interests in the country and its surrounding region becomes more difficult in those scenarios.

⁹ Joshua Meservey, "Travelling for an Idea: The Appeal of Al-Shabaab to Diaspora in the West," in *War and Peace in Somalia: National Grievances, Local Conflict and Al-Shabaab*, edited by Michael Keating and Matt Waldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

¹⁰ Joshua Meservey, "A Growing Challenge for America's Somalia Policy," *The Daily Signal*, January 9, 2020, <https://www.dailysignal.com/2020/01/09/a-growing-challenge-for-americas-somalia-policy/>.

¹¹ "Mali Hotel Attack: US Citizen Among 21 Dead, American Govt. Looking for Others," *ABC News*, November 21, 2015, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/americans-hostages-rescued-mali-hotel/story?id=35319879>; "Burkina Faso Attack: Foreigners Killed at Luxury Hotel," *BBC*, January 16, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-35332792>; Aislinn Laing and Henry Samuel, "Al Qaeda Claims Responsibility for Ivory Coast Hotel Shooting in which 16 'Including Four Europeans' Killed at Resort," *The Telegraph*, March 14, 2016, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/africaandindianocean/cotedivoire/12192667/Ivory-Coast-hotel-shooting-Gunmen-open-fire-and-kill-11-in-beach-resort-Grand-Bassam-latest.html>.

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- 3) **Creating the type of instability that provides opportunities for American competitors.** Russia's Wagner Group that is now embedded in strategic areas of Libya entered the country during the widespread instability brought on in part by terrorist groups. Wagner also now has a major operation in Mali, Niger's coup government contacted the group for help,¹² and there are rumors that the mercenaries may be in Burkina Faso, though that is disputed.¹³ Wagner's activities contributed to the European Union and some European countries suspending certain types of assistance, including their provision of combat training missions, in the Central African Republic and Mali.¹⁴ The result is that the security situations in those countries deteriorated, and the U.S. has fewer close partners with which to cooperate on the problem.
- 4) **Undermining important economic projects.** This is a less pronounced threat than the others listed, but still meaningful. Terrorism-related insecurity harms local and even national economies, deepening poverty. It can also directly threaten U.S. economic interests. For instance, ASWJ in northern Mozambique shut down operations around a massive natural gas field in the area, an operation supported by American companies and the U.S. government through the U.S. Development Finance Corporation (USDFC) and EXIM.

The Two Pillars of African Terrorism

Unfortunately, the situation in Africa suggests that these dangers will remain potent and will likely grow. One pillar of the terrorism problem in Africa is the dismal state of governance that creates an enabling environment for terrorist appeals. In the latest Ibrahim Index of African Governance, African countries average a 49 out of 100 score.¹⁵ Unaccountable, abusive, and incompetent governments strengthen the appeal of terrorist groups who claim to have the solution to problems governments cause or cannot solve. A government's inability to protect its people also increases the chances that they will acquiesce or support a terrorist group simply out of self-preservation.

The recent rash of coups highlights the weak and insufficient governance on the continent and suggests that the problem is going to worsen. Coup governments rarely deliver the type of

¹² Sam Mednick, "Niger's Junta Asks for Help from Russian Group Wagner as it Faces Military Intervention Threat," AP, August 5, 2023, <https://apnews.com/article/wagner-russia-coup-niger-military-force-e0e1108b58a9e955af465a3efe6605c0>.

¹³ Lalla Sy, "Wagner Group: Burkina Faso Anger over Russian Mercenary Link," *BBC*, December 16, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-63998458>.

¹⁴ "Germany to End EU training Mission in Mali," Reuters, May 5, 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/germany-ready-continue-un-mission-mali-defmin-2022-05-04/>; "France Suspends Aid, Military Support for Central African Republic," Reuters, June 9, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/france-suspends-aid-military-support-central-african-republic-2021-06-08/>; "EU Suspends Military Training in Central Africa over Russian Mercenaries," Reuters, December 15, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/eu-centralafrica-security-idAFL8N2T0586>.

¹⁵ Calculations by author. The data can be found at Mo Ibrahim Foundation, <https://iiag.online/>.

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transparent, effective, and responsive governance that is necessary to ameliorate the enabling environment for terrorism. Burkina Faso and Mali are illustrative examples. Terrorism-related deaths in the former grew by 376 percent in 2022,¹⁶ which followed the January coup that year that ousted President Roch Marc Christian Kaboré.¹⁷ In the latter, violent terrorist incidents have increased three-fold since the country's first coup in 2020.¹⁸ While the security situations in both countries were extremely poor before the coups, it is highly probable that the new military governments are even more incompetent at containing the spread of terrorism than were the civilian governments they replaced.

Furthermore, the Wagner Group to which some coup governments have turned operates in ways that exacerbates the governance deficiencies that contribute to terrorism in the first place. Wagner's habitual brutality alienates communities whose support is needed to effectively fight terrorism, and its parasitic nature leaches away the scant governing capacity its partner regimes have.

The other key element of the African terrorism problem is the Salafi-jihadi ideology that motivates the core of many of these groups. Most Muslims in Africa traditionally practiced their faith according to Sufi rites, the syncretism and mysticism of which repels Salafis. Over the last several decades, however, Salafism has grown throughout the continent, and even become the dominant practice in some countries like Somalia. While only a small minority of Salafis are violent, and other sects—including Sufiism—have produced Islamist terrorists, the rapid growth of Salafism in Africa has widened the pool of Muslims who share some core theological beliefs with Salafi-jihadis.¹⁹

A more recent global development may have negative consequences for the fight against African terrorism as well. The poorly planned and executed 2021 U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan amid the Taliban's reconquest has once again created an entire country that can serve as a terrorist haven. The notorious Haqqani Network—an eager supporter of Islamist terrorism abroad—has embedded itself in the Taliban government.²⁰ And according to leaked U.S. Department of Defense documents, the Islamic State now uses Afghanistan as a hub from which to coordinate its activities and plot attacks against the U.S.,²¹ while the United Nations reports that al-Qaeda recently established five

¹⁶ Institute for Economics & Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2023*.

¹⁷ The leader of the January 2022 coup, Paul-Henri Sandaogo Damiba, was himself unseated in September 2022 by a coup led by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, the current ruler of Burkina Faso.

¹⁸ Africa Center for Strategic Studies, *Mali Catastrophe Accelerating under Junta Rule*, July 10, 2023, <https://africacenter.org/spotlight/mali-catastrophe-accelerating-under-junta-rule/>.

¹⁹ Joshua Meservey, "Sahelian Islam's Shift Towards Salafism And Its Implications For Regional Terrorism," Hoover Institution, September 21, 2021, <https://www.hoover.org/research/sahelian-islams-shift-towards-salafism-and-its-implications-regional-terrorism>.

²⁰ Jeff M. Smith, "The Haqqani Network: The New Kingmakers in Kabul," *War on the Rocks*, November 12, 2021, <https://warontherocks.com/2021/11/the-haqqani-network-afghanistans-new-power-players/>.

²¹ Dan Lamothe and Joby Warrick, "Afghanistan Has Become a Terrorism Staging Ground Again, Leak Reveals," *Washington Post*, April 22, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national-security/2023/04/22/afghanistan-terrorism-leaked-documents/>.

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new training camps in the country.²² There is a long history of African terrorists training or fighting in Afghanistan and returning to the continent to strengthen or even start terrorist organizations.²³ Because of what happened recently in Afghanistan, that danger is once again relevant.

Recommendations

While the scale of the problem of African terrorism is daunting, the U.S. is not helpless against it, though it is also not the decisive actor in the fight. American interventions will only be effective if they enhance what effective and committed governments, militaries, civil society organizations, and ordinary citizens are trying to achieve on the ground in terrorism affected areas.

The U.S. should:

- 1) Coordinate the fight against terrorism with partners and allies.** The problem of African terrorism is too large for the U.S. alone, so it should partner as closely as necessary to achieve the most effect with partners. That includes non-African partners such as Israel and European countries, as well as African states like Rwanda and Uganda. The latter two countries highlight a dilemma that faces American policymakers, namely that some of the U.S.'s most effective and accommodating security partners in Africa do not have the level of democracy that Washington wishes. Yet Rwanda is by far the most effective force fighting ASWJ in northern Mozambique. Uganda has been a core element of the anti-al-Shabaab fight in Somalia for years, and is also battling the truly vicious Allied Democratic Forces in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In these cases, American interests require that Washington work closely with those countries, while

²² Some U.S. government officials dispute the U.N.'s reporting, as seen here: Jeff Seldin, "UN Report Warns Al-Qaida, Islamic State Growing in Afghanistan," VOA, June 14, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/un-report-warns-al-qaida-islamic-state-growing-in-afghanistan/7138133.html>. However, some counterterrorism scholars have pushed back on the U.S. officials' assertions here: Bill Roggio, "On Eve of 9/11 Anniversary, U.S. Officials Continue to Downplay Al Qaeda's Presence in Afghanistan," FDD's Long War Journal, September 11, 2023, <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2023/09/u-s-officials-continue-to-downplay-al-qaedas-presence-in-afghanistan.php> and here: Kévin Jackson (@allegesonjihad) "US intelligence claim that Ayman al-Zawahiri was the only senior al-Qa'ida official in the Taliban's Afghanistan. Not everyone agrees though. For @akhbar, I profile Hamza al-Ghamidi, a top Saudi al-Qa'ida leader said to be based in Afghanistan:," X, September 15, 2023, 10:39 AM, <https://twitter.com/allegesonjihad/status/1702693543335035127?t=xbyODorGLXMptHLKoQJYVg&s=03>. For the U.N. report, see United Nations Security Council, *Fourteenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Monitoring Team Submitted Pursuant to Resolution 2665 (2022) Concerning the Taliban and other Associated Individuals and Entities Constituting a Threat to the Peace Stability and Security of Afghanistan*, June 1, 2023, <https://docplayer.net/233358581-Security-council-United-nations-s-2023-370.html>.

²³ For instance, the Armed Islamic Group (known by its French acronym, GIA), an offshoot of which would eventually become al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, first connected with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. One of the Sahel's most notorious terrorists, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, also fought in Afghanistan against the Soviets, as did many of the founders of al-Shabaab.

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also seeking opportunities to influence them towards more democratic governance. Such are the difficult tradeoffs and balancing acts that are necessary in the fight against African terrorism.

- 2) **Cooperate with West African countries to build a terrorism firebreak.** Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are the epicenter of the explosion in Sahelian terrorism, and the problem is going to worsen. Neighboring those countries are relatively stable states like Senegal, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, and Togo that are friendly to the U.S., but which are threatened by violence spreading from their terrorism-affected neighbors. The U.S. should focus its efforts in the Sahel on helping those countries protect themselves, which will require helping to coordinate their counterterrorism efforts, sharing intelligence, working with them to enhance their governance capacities, and maintaining a robust counterterrorism presence in the region.
- 3) **Hold countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar to their promises to stop funding extremism, including the proselytization of fundamentalist Islam.** Saudi Arabia alone spent tens of billions of dollars spreading Wahhabism, its version of Salafism, throughout places like Africa. Recently, however, the Kingdom appears to be taking steps to make good on its promise to reform,²⁴ though judging such things with precision is difficult. The U.S. should encourage Saudi Arabia's efforts, though it should also monitor them to ensure there is no reversal. The U.S. should also help countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar refine their abilities to disrupt the flow of private money from their citizens to extremist causes worldwide. Morocco, meanwhile, has for years run a home-grown effort to debunk Salafi-jihadi theology,²⁵ and the U.S. should do what it can to support that program, and encourage other Muslim-majority countries to do the same.

²⁴ For a few representative examples from the Muslim World League, Saudi Arabia's most prominent and semi-official charity that once funded extremism around the world, see "The Vice President of Burundi Inaugurates the International Forum of the Muslim World League on 'Religious and Ethnic Pluralism and Positive Coexistence,'" Muslim World League, January 21, 2019, <https://www.themwl.org/en/node/35919>; "Muslim World League Head Becomes First Recipient of Award Uniting Faiths," *Jewish News Syndicate*, June 9, 2020, <https://www.jns.org/muslim-world-league-head-becomes-first-recipient-of-award-uniting-faiths/>. See also Eldad J. Pardo, *Review of Selected Saudi Textbooks 2020–21*, Institute for Monitoring Peace and Cultural Tolerance in School Education, December 2020, <https://www.impact-se.org/wp-content/uploads/Review-of-Selected-Saudi-Textbooks-2020-21.pdf>; Robert Satloff, "A Historic Holocaust Awareness Awakening in Saudi Arabia, of All Places," The Washington Institute, January 26, 2018, <http://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/view/a-historic-holocaust-awareness-awakening-in-saudi-arabia-of-all-places>.

²⁵ Jean-Marie Lemaire and Sara Doublier, "Video: Morocco's Anti-Jihadist Strategy," *France 24*, May 25, 2016, <https://www.france24.com/en/20160325-reporters-morocco-anti-jihad-strategy-counter-terrorism-intelligence>.

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- 4) **Ensure adequate religious literacy among U.S. diplomats and military personnel.** Religion remains the dominant organizing principle in many societies around the world, but the U.S. has a recent poor track record in understanding religiously motivated actors like Salafi-jihadi terrorists.²⁶ Misunderstanding Salafi-jihadis' core religious convictions makes it impossible to create an effective strategy for fighting them, with potentially profound consequences for American security.
- 5) **Continue and enhance efforts to bolster trade and investment between the U.S. and Africa.** One element of the enabling environment for terrorism in Africa is the lack of economic opportunity many Africans face. Increased U.S. private sector investment would allow American companies to reap more of the economic opportunities on the continent while also creating jobs for Africans and contributing to economic growth. Understandably, few American companies are interested in operating in the most terrorist-prone areas, yet any contribution they make to growing economies and more jobs elsewhere could help ameliorate some of the appeal of Salafi-jihadism in those places. Congress can also ensure that U.S. agencies like the USDFC and Prosper Africa prioritize helping the U.S. private sector in Africa. It should also push State Department to fulfill its obligation created by the Championing American Business Through Diplomacy act to prioritize commercial diplomacy.²⁷
- 6) **Continue, improve, and expand support for African civil society organizations.** These groups are often among the few that are capable and committed enough to push their governments to perform better. However, just as the security situation has deteriorated in places despite substantial American military investments, governance and democracy in Africa has also weakened despite significant American support to African civil society organizations. The U.S. needs to study why in some cases our support for civil society and better governance has failed, and make the necessary reforms.

Conclusion

African terrorism is a generational challenge, and current trends are running in the wrong direction. The U.S. must remain focused and committed to supporting Africans who are on the front lines battling the twin pillars of the problem, poor governance and the Salafi-jihadi ideology. Any weariness

²⁶ Emilie Kao and Joshua Meserve, *Minding the "God Gap": ISIS' Genocide of Religious Minorities and American Statecraft*, The Heritage Foundation, November 8, 2018, <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/report/minding-the-god-gap-isis-genocide-religious-minorities-and-american>.

²⁷ U.S. House of Representatives, *22 USC Ch. 106: Championing American Business through Diplomacy*, no date, <https://uscode.house.gov/view.xhtml?path=/prelim@title22/chapter106&edition=prelim>.

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or complacency about the challenge is likely to have damaging consequences to Americans and American national interests.